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Viewing cable 09BEIRUT541, LEBANON: UNSCOL DOWNBEAT ON MARCH 14'S CHANCES

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Understanding cables

Every cable message consists of three parts:

- The top box shows each cables unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
- The bottom box presents the body of the cable. The opening can contain a more specific subject, references to other cables ([browse by origin](#) to find them) or additional comment. This is followed by the main contents of the cable: a summary, a collection of specific topics and a comment section.

To understand the justification used for the classification of each cable, please use this [WikiSource](#) article as reference.

Discussing cables

If you find meaningful or important information in a cable, please link directly to its unique reference number. Linking to a specific paragraph in the body of a cable is also possible by copying the appropriate link (to be found at the paragraph symbol). Please mark messages for social networking services like Twitter with the hash tags **#cablegate** and a hash containing the reference ID e.g. **#09BEIRUT541**.

Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
09BEIRUT541	2009-05-14 11:22	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Beirut

Appears in these articles:

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/13/2019

TAGS: PREL PGOV PTER PINR UNSC MARR MOPS IS SY LE

SUBJECT: LEBANON: UNSCOL DOWNBEAT ON MARCH 14'S CHANCES

Classified By: Ambassador Michele J. Sison for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) UN Special Coordinator for Lebanon Michael Williams raised with NEA DAS Hale and Ambassador the idea of delaying any possible Israeli withdrawal from Ghajar village until after the Lebanese election on June 7, so as to avoid opponents of the Siniora government using the charge that Israel is trying to help Siniora. He emphasized that whenever the Israelis did withdraw, it should be without conditions. Williams travels to Israel to discuss Ghajar May 10. On the elections, Williams thought March 14 was not doing well and their opponents might win a five or six seat majority in the new parliament. The meeting in Williams' office also covered post-election scenarios, the Special

Tribunal for Lebanon, and USG officials trip to Syria on May 17. End Summary.

12. (C) Visiting NEA Deputy Assistant Secretary David Hale and Ambassador met with UN Special Coordinator for Lebanon (UNSCOL) Michael Williams on May 9 at the new UNSCOL headquarters in the Beirut suburb of Yarze. DCM and UNSCOL staffers Jack Christofides and Rami Shehadi also attended.

Ghajar -- Israel Must Not Set Conditions

13. (C) Williams said he would travel to Israel the next day, May 10, to meet with Deputy FM Danny Ayalon and MFA Director General Yossi Gal. He did not expect a breakthrough on Ghajar, but hoped to get an indication of what the Israelis might do. He told DAS Hale it was critical that the Israelis not "ask for anything" in return for withdrawal from Ghajar.

14. (C) Williams raised the idea that, at this point, perhaps it was best for Israel not to withdraw from Ghajar before the June 7 Lebanese elections. When there was a recent Israeli press report saying Israel might withdraw to help PM Siniora and his allies in the June 7 vote, Siniora had felt obliged to distance himself from that, in order to avoid having the opposition claim that Israel was helping him. Williams said March 14 stalwarts Marwan Hamadeh and Mohamed Chatah had urged such a delay when he spoke to them three days before at the Ambassador's reception for former Secretary Madeleine Albright and an NDI delegation. Williams emphasized that if the Israelis attempted to put conditions on their withdrawal, it would hurt March 14, and the coalition, he thought, is nervous about that.

15. (C) DAS Hale responded that the USG supported Israeli withdrawal from Ghajar. It would be seen as a breakthrough, fulfill a key element of UNSCR 1701, and be a confidence-building measure between the new Israeli government and the Lebanese government.

16. DAS Hale said that during his meeting with President Sleiman the previous day, Sleiman had expressed concern that if the GOI resettles Ghajar citizens in Israel as part of its withdrawal, squatters might take over the empty houses, and he told Williams it would be important to address that if and when UNIFIL took over Ghajar.

17. (C) The Ambassador asked if UN U/S for Peacekeeping LeRoy had made progress on obtaining additional cluster munitions strike data from Israel. Christofides responded in the negative, adding that at the recent Tripartite meeting of UNIFIL and the Lebanese and Israeli armed forces, UNIFIL Commander Graziano had pushed back when the Israeli representative had said this was not a requirement of UNSCR 1701. The Israeli also downplayed the significance of upcoming Israeli military exercises near the border on or about May 31. When the Lebanese asked for a public Israeli statement that they are not significant, the Israeli representative agreed to ask the GOI to consider that.

Elections -- Opposition May Get Five Seat Majority

18. (C) DAS Hale said he came to Lebanon with an impression that the March 14 coalition was stumbling. "I share that," Williams noted, saying that he sees an increased possibility the opposition will gain the majority with a five-six seat margin. He thought the release of the four generals, Jumblatt's critical comments about Maronites and weak March 14 campaigning had hurt the coalition. He agreed with DAS Hale that former PM Najib Mikati is seeking to become PM again in the new government. The two agreed that Speaker Nabih Berri seems to be hinting that he may reposition himself slightly after the election based on his warm words for Jumblatt and his cool reaction to the release of the four generals, a stark contrast to the public, positive reaction of Berri's current ally Hizballah.

¶9. (C) DAS Hale noted that while in Saudi Arabia before coming to Beirut, he had discussed the Lebanese elections with former Ambassador to Lebanon and current Minister Khoja -- who is "all over the election" -- and a son of the King. The Saudis feel they have provided all the funding they have to in support of the Lebanese election and if it has been managed poorly by Hariri and others, it's not their problem, but they are nervous about the outcome. DAS Hale said he also was struck by the Saudis current feeling that Syria has not responded to their overtures to improve relations.

Post-Election Scenarios

¶10. (C) Williams said he has been expressing alarm to Lebanese interlocutors to no avail about the lack of a Constitutional Council to resolve election conflicts owing to a dispute over the final five members. The international election observers will "tear you apart" over this, Williams said he has told the Lebanese. He hopes Interior Minister Baroud will get this done.

¶11. (C) Williams predicted there would be national unity government again, but there could be a fight over the issue of the blocking third in the cabinet. Hizballah will argue that the blocking third structure has worked in the current government and should be continued, he thought. DAS Hale said that if March 14 falters, it is likely the USG would have to consider working more with the Presidency, post-election.

¶12. (C) Williams said Hizballah had shown a hardened attitude in his recent meetings with them, which he attributed to anger over the reference to Hizballah interference in Egypt in the recent UNSCR 1559 report prepared by Terje Roed Larson. Hizballah is embarrassed and unhappy about the public disclosure of their activities outside of Lebanon, Williams said.

Special Tribunal -- Chief Judge Not Coming Until After Election

¶13. (C) Williams said he would be traveling to the Hague in ten days to give testimony in the Yugoslavia war crimes tribunal (he served in the former Yugoslavia during the mid-1990s conflict) and would see officials of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL) while there. He revealed that he had recommended that STL head judge Antonio Cassese postpone his planned mid-May trip to Lebanon so as to avoid election-season sensitivities. Williams said that he worried about the impact on the Tribunal's progress resulting from the resignation of STL registrar Robin Vincent, prompted by Vincent's "disastrous" relations with lead prosecutor Daniel Bellemare. He did not expect any STL indictments this year, pointing out that the active trial for which he will be providing testimony soon concerned crimes from 15 years ago. This fact "stuns Lebanese interlocutors" who are hoping for fast action by the STL, Williams said.

¶14. (C) On the release of the four generals, Williams thought it could have been done as early as March 2008, minimizing the negative impact for the March 14 of the release that took place a few weeks ago, so close to the election.

Syria

¶15. (C) DAS Hale told Williams that no new ground had been broken during the visit to Syria two days before by NEA A/AS Jeffrey Feltman and NSC Senior Director Daniel Shapiro. The Syrians considered that they had signaled a major opening with small steps such as allowing the U.S.-supported language school to reopen and were annoyed the USG had not responded with more, such as a Special Envoy Mitchell visit.

¶16. (U) DAS Hale has cleared this cable.

